

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

SAM-01 SAJ-01 PRS-01 EUR-08 NEA-07 /049 W

----- 004831

R 270901Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5164

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 2076

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, SN

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ON HIS
VISIT TO CHINA

SUMMARY. IN A CONVERSATION WITH ME ON APRIL 26 CONCERNING HIS
CHINA VISIT, PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW TOLD ME THAT THE INI-
TIATIVE FOR THE VISIT HAD COME FROM THE CHINESE, AND HE WAS
PUZZLED AS TO THEIR MOTIVATION. HE WAS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT
THEIR STYLE-- WOULD THEY RESPOND FAVORABLY TO FRANKNESS, AND
WOULD THEY BE "OPPRESSIVE" IN TERMS OF LISTENING IN ON PRIVATE
CONVERSATIONS? HE MADE IT PLAIN THAT HE DID NOT INTEND TO EX-
TEND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS TO THE PRC DURING THE VISIT, AND
THAT SINGAPORE'S POLICY OF DEFERRING RECOGNITION UNTIL INDONESIA

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RESTORES RELATIONS WITH CHINA REMAINS UNCHANGED. HE WILL NOT

USE MANDARIN DURING THE VISIT IN ORDER TO AVOID SUGGESTING THAT SINGAPORE IS PART OF CHINA, AND WILL TELL THE CHINESE THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SINGAPORE IS NEGLIGIBLE. HE SEES THE CHINESE THEMSELVES AS POSSIBLY BECOMING THE DOMINANT FORCE IN THIS REGION WITHIN 15 YEARS. HE PROBABLY VIEWS THE VISIT AS DRAWING HIM MORE DEEPLY THAN HE WOULD PREFER INTO THE INTERPLAY AMONG THE MAJOR WORLD POWERS, BUT WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE TRIP TO LEARN ALL HE CAN ABOUT CHINA AND THE CHINESE. IT IS LIKELY THAT HE WILL DESCRIBE IN FRANK TERMS TO THE CHINESE THOSE AREAS WHERE SINGAPORE AND PRC POLICIES DIFFER, IN THE EXPECTATION THAT THEY WILL LIVE WITH THESE DIFFERENCES FOR SOME TIME TO COME. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW CALLED ME TO ISTANA ANNEX APRIL 26 TO ASK ME, BASED ON MY EXPERIENCES IN CHINA, JUST WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO PAY A VISIT TO THE PRC. SPECIFICALLY, WERE THE CHINESE AS "OPPRESSIVE" IN THEIR CAPACITY AS HOSTS AS HE HAD FOUND THE SOVIETS TO BE? MOST IMPORTANTLY, WHAT WERE THE CHINESE HOPING TO GAIN FROM HIS VISIT, PARTICULARLY AT THIS TIME?

2. WE ADDRESSED THE LAST QUESTION FIRST. IT TRANSPIRED THAT INITIATIVE FOR PM'S VISIT HAD COME ENTIRELY FROM THE CHINESE. KHUKRIT PRAMOT HAD RELAYED AN INVITATION FROM THE PRC TO THE PM FOLLOWING KHUKRIT'S VISIT TO CHINA IN MID-1975, AND THIS HAD BEEN FOLLOWED UP BY PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT MARCOS WHO AFTER GOING TO CHINA HAD RELAYED AN "URGENT" INVITATION FROM CHOU EN-LAI. PM LEE, NOT REALIZING THE GRAVITY OF CHOU EN-LAI'S ILLNESS AT THE TIME, HAD DEFERRED. THEN, DURING THE PM'S VISIT TO IRAN IN SEPTEMBER HAD ENCOUNTERED THE PRC AMBASSADOR TO TEHRAN AT A DINNER GIVEN BY IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER HODDADI, AND THE PRC AMBASSADOR ONCE AGAIN EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO PM LEE TO VISIT CHINA. THIS TIME LEE HAD ACCEPTED, AND A FORMAL INVITATION WAS RECEIVED IN SINGAPORE IN NOVEMBER. BEFORE A FIRM DATE COULD BE WORKED OUT TO SUIT PM LEE'S SCHEDULE, CHOU EN-LAI'S DEATH AND THE ENSUING POLITICAL CHANGES IN CHINA TOOK PLACE, LEADING PM LEE TO QUERY PEKING AS TO WHETHER THE INVITATION WAS STILL VALID. (IT HAD BEEN ISSUED IN THE NAME OF PREMIER CHOU.) THE CHINESE HAD RESPONDED WITH A NEW INVITATION ISSUED IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, FOLLOWING WHICH THE PM'S MAY 10 ARRIVAL DATE IN PEKING WAS FINALLY SET. PM LEE

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WAS PUZZLED AT THE CHINESE MOTIVATION IN PRESSING FOR THE VISIT.

3. I COMMENTED THAT THE CHINESE EVIDENTLY VERY MUCH WANTED PM LEE'S VISIT TO COME OFF AT THIS TIME. I SPECULATED THAT THE VISIT WOULD BE ANOTHER INDICATION OF CONTINUITY IN PRC FOREIGN POLICY, AS INDICATED BY PREMIER HUA KUO-FENG'S BANQUET SPEECH HONORING THE EGYPTIAN VICE PRESIDENT, WHEN HUA HAD SPOKEN OF MAINTAINING AND EVEN INTENSIFYING "MAO TSE-TUNG'S REVOLUTIONARY

LINE IN FOREIGN POLICY." IT WOULD ALSO-- DESPITE FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM'S RECENT VISIT TO THE USSR--BY ITS VERY NATURE SUGGEST THAT SINGAPORE LEANED IN THE DIRECTION OF THE PRC IN THE CURRENT PRC-SOVIET DISPUTE. WITH ALL DUE RESPECT TO FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM (WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT DURING THE CONVERSATION), THE PM'S CHINA VISIT WOULD ASSUME A HIGHER PROFILE THAN THAT OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S TRIP TO THE USSR. I FURTHER JUDGED THAT THE CHINESE WANTED TO TAKE THE MEASURE OF THE PM AND TEST HIS METTLE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CONVEYING YET ANOTHER INDICATION OF A FAVORABLE PRC ATTITUDE TOWARD ASEAN IN VIEW OF PM LEE'S SUPPORT FOR THAT BODY. ALL THIS ADDED UP TO AN EFFORT TO WIN FRIENDS IN A STRATEGIC REGION, AND DEMONSTRATE THAT "CHINA HAS FRIENDS EVERYWHERE." PM LEE REMARKED THAT PEKING CERTAINLY KNEW FROM HIS STATEMENTS AND FROM INTELLIGENCE APPRAISALS OBTAINED VIA "AGENTS SENT FROM HONG KONG IN THE BANK OF CHINA" THAT HE STOOD FIRMLY AGAINST COMMUNISM IN SINGAPORE. I SAID THAT TO THE CHINESE, INFORMATION OF THIS SORT COULD NOT COMPARE WITH PERSONAL EVALUATIONS MADE ACROSS A GREEN BAIZE TALECLOTH. I ASSUMED THAT THE PM HIMSELF WOULD LIKE TO MAKE THE SAME KIND OF EVALUATION.

4. AS TO SINGAPORE'S POLICY, PM LEE CONTINUED, HE DEFINITELY WOULD NOT EXTEND DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION TO THE PRC DURING HIS VISIT. RECOGNITION WOULD ONLY NEEDLESSLY ANTAGONIZE INDONESIA, AND SINGAPORE'S POSITION REMAINED UNCHANGED: SINGAPORE WOULD FOLLOW INDONESIA AND WOULD BE THE LAST ASEAN COUNTRY TO RECOGNIZE THE PRC.

5. THE PM THEN RETURNED TO THE QUESTION OF "OPPRESSION," AND WONDERED ABOUT CHINESE STYLE - WOULD THEY TAKE OFFENSE AT FRANKNESS ON HIS PART, AS HAD BEEN CASE WITH THE SOVIETS DURING HIS TWO TRIPS TO THE USSR, AND WOULD THEY ATTEMPT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIM BY EAVESDROPPING ON PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

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AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE SINGAPORE DELEGATION? ON THE FIRST POINT, I SAID THAT THE CHINESE APPRECIATED FRANKNESS, BUT BEING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM WOULD ALSO EXPECT FRANKNESS TO BE EXPRESSED DIPLOMATICALLY. IN MY OPINION, THEY HAD CONTEMPT FOR THOSE WHO TRIED TO FLATTER THEM BY SAYING WHAT THE CHINESE PRESUMABLY WISHED TO HEAR. THEY WERE NOT ADVERSE, HOWEVER, TO PRAISE OF CHINESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS WHERE SUCH PRAISE WAS CLEARLY DUE. ON THE EAVESDROPPING QUESTION, IT PROBABLY SHOULD BE ASSUMED THAT THE CHINESE HAD THE CAPABILITY TO LISTEN IN IF THEY SO DESIRED, THOUGH AS GOOD HOSTS THEY WERE INCLINED TO BE LESS HEAVY-HANDED THAN I UNDERSTOOD THE SOVIET CUSTOM TO BE.

HOLDRIDGE

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6. THE CONVERSATION THEN TOUCHED UPON CHINESE PROCEDURES AT AIRPORT ARRIVALS, BANQUET SPEECHES, CONVERSATIONS ACROSS THE GREEN BAIZE TABLECLOTH, CONTACTS OUTSIDE NORMAL MEETINGS, AND SIGHTSEEING. LEE MADE IT PLAIN THAT HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE CHINA VISIT, AND FOUND THE PROSPECT OF TWO WEEKS IN CONSTANT CONTACT WITH A HANDFUL OF SENIOR (AND INSCRUTABLE) PEOPLE RATHER UNPALATABLE.

7. PM LEE NOTED THAT DESPITE HIS KNOWLEDGE OF MANDARIN HE INTENDS TO USE ENGLISH THROUGHOUT THE VISIT. TO USE MANDARIN, HE SAID, WOULD CONVEY THE IMPRESSION TO THE CHINESE THAT SINGAPORE WAS PART OF CHINA. HE EMPHASIZED THAT SINGAPORE WAS NOT A PART OF CHINA, BUT WAS A FOREIGN STATE, AND THE CHINESE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THIS FACT.

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8. ONE ASPECT OF THE VISIT IN WHICH PM LEE DISPLAYED KEEN INTEREST WAS THE STRUCTURING OF THE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CHINESE. WAS IT TRUE THAT THEIR CUSTOM WAS TO CALL ON THE VISITOR TO SPEAK FIRST? I CONFIRMED THAT SUCH WAS THE CASE, THE CHINESE TAKING THE LINE THAT THEY WERE HOSTS AND THEIR HONORED GUESTS SHOULD THEREFORE TAKE THE LEAD. HOWEVER, THIS CUSTOM ALLOWED THE VISITOR TO DELINEATE THE TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED; E.G. IF THE PM SO WISHED HE COULD ASK FOR A GENERAL REVIEW OF WORLD AFFAIRS, INCLUDING THE SITUATION IN WESTERN EUROPE, AFRICA, THE INDIAN OCEAN, AND OF COURSE SOUTHEAST ASIA. I ASSUMED THAT THE CHINESE WOULD BRING UP THEIR STANDARD ACCUSATIONS THAT WORLD TENSIONS WERE DUE ENTIRELY TO THE "STRUGGLE FOR HEGEMONY BETWEEN THE TWO SUPERPOWERS," FOLLOWING WHICH THEY WOULD PROBABLY CONTINUE WITH A REVIEW IN DEPTH OF THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH THE SOVIET UNION. PM LEE REMARKED AT THIS POINT THAT THE CHINESE WERE MOST SURELY UNHAPPY AT THE RAPID GROWTH OF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN INDO-CHINA SINCE THE VIETNAM WAR RISING OUT OF THE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE THE SOVIETS WERE PROVIDING HANOI. HE DOUBTED THAT THE CHINESE HAD FORESEEN SUCH A RAPID CHANGE, NOR WOULD BE HAPPY OVER THE GROWTH OF ANTI-CHINESE POWER SO CLOSE TO THEIR FRONTIERS. PARENTHETICALLY, PM LEE OBSERVED THAT HE WOULD TELL THE CHINESE THAT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SINGAPORE WAS NEGLIGIBLE. THE SOVIETS HAD INVESTED OVER US\$1 BILLION IN SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY, BUT HAD LOST A LOT OF MONEY DUE TO INEPTITUDE AND CORRUPTION ON THE PART OF THEIR LOCAL AGENTS. THE SITUATION HERE WAS UNDER CONTROL, THOUGH THE SAME WAS NOT NECESSARILY THE CASE IN MALAYSIA WHERE THE SOVIETS WERE WORKING TO INFLUENCE RADICAL MALAYS.

9. PM LEE REFERRED BRIEFLY TO THE INTERNAL POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS APPARENT IN CHINA, BUT EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT REGARDLESS OF THESE CONTRADICTIONS CHINA WOULD IN DUE COURSE STRAIGHTEN ITSELF OUT AND BECOME THE DOMINANT FORCE IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD. HE FORESAW, IN FACT, THAT CHINA'S DOMINANCE COULD TAKE PLACE IN AS LITTLE AS FIFTEEN YEARS, AFTER WHICH ALL THE NATIONS OF THE REGION WOULD DEFER TO THE PRC IN MATTERS OF POLICY. I TOLD HIM THAT I DID NOT WANT TO BE A POLLY-ANNA, BUT THERE WERE MANY PROBLEMS FOR THE PRC TO SOLVE BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY BEFORE IT COULD PROJECT ITSELF OUTSIDE ITS BORDERS IN A MAJOR WAY. IF IN FACT CHINA DID SETTLE DOWN TO A PROGRAM AIMED, AS CHOU EN-LAI HAD DEFINED IT IN JANUARY 1975, AT PUTTING CHINA

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IN THE FOREFRONT OF MODERN NATIONS BY THE END OF THE CENTURY, THIS MIGHT IN ITSELF FOCUS CHINA'S ATTENTION MORE ON INTERNAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAN ON EXTERNAL POLITICAL OBJECTIVES.

10. FINALLY, PM LEE THANKED ME FOR THE MATERIALS WHICH HE HAD RECEIVED FROM US, AND HOPED THAT SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MIGHT BE FORTHCOMING ON PERSONALITIES IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WHOM HE AND THE MEMBERS OF THE SINGAPORE DELEGATION WOULD ENCOUNTER. I SAID I BELIEVED THAT BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THIS NATURE WAS IN FACT ALREADY BEING PREPARED FOR HIS USE.

11. COMMENT: IN MY PREVIOUS ESTIMATE OF PM LEE'S MOTIVES IN GOING TO THE PRC, I CALCULATED THAT THE GOVERNING FACTOR WAS HIS CURIOSITY ABOUT CHINA, ITS LEADERS, AND THE EFFECTS OF ITS POLICIES ON SINGAPORE'S OWN SITUATION. FROM WHAT HE TOLD ME IT NOW APPEARS THAT WHILE THIS IS THE CASE FROM HIS OWN STANDPOINT, THE SAME CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE CHINESE WITH RESPECT TO HIM. I BELIEVE HE FINDS HIMSELF IN A RATHER UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION OF BEING DRAWN AGAINST HIS INCLINATIONS INTO THE MAIN ARENA OF INTERPLAY AMONG THE MAJOR WORLD POWERS. NEVERTHELESS, NOW THAT THE DIE IS CAST HE CHARACTERISTICALLY IS PREPARED TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF HIS CHINA VISIT TO LEARN WHAT HE CAN ABOUT THE PRC, AND EQUALLY CHARACTERISTICALLY IS ASSIDUOUSLY DOING HIS HOMEWORK. THE MATERIALS WE HAVE SUPPLIED HAVE BEEN WELL RECEIVED IN THIS REGARD. I FOUND HIS CONCERN ABOUT "FRANKNESS" INTRIGUING, AND BELIEVE THAT HE FULLY INTENDS TO LET THE CHINESE KNOW -- DIPLOMATICALLY, OF COURSE -- THOSE AREAS WHERE SINGAPORE POLICIES DIFFER WITH PRC POLICIES IN THE EXPECTATION THAT CHINA WILL LIVE WITH THESE DIFFERENCES (WHICH INCLUDE SINGAPORE'S GENERAL ANTI-COMMUNIST STANCE AND TROOP-TRAINING PROGRAM ON TAIWAN) FOR SOME TIME TO COME. HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

Automatic DecapTIONing: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 APR 1976
DecapTION Date: 28 MAY 2004
DecapTION Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SINGAP02076
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760159-0286
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760418/aaaaaooi.tel
Line Count: 305
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 MAY 2004 by CollinP0>; APPROVED <02 SEP 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ON HIS VISIT TO CHINA
TAGS: PFOR, CH, SN, US, (LEE KUAN YEW), (HOLDRIDGE, JOHN H)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006